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# "Twitter, the most brilliant tough love editor you'll ever have." Reading and writing socially during the Twitter Fiction Festival

by Joachim Vlieghe, Kelly Page, and Kris Rutten

## Abstract

The communication practice of tweeting has fostered numerous literary experiments, like Teju Cole's series "Small fates" and Jennifer Egan's novel "Black box". In late 2012, these experiments culminated in an event that focused on such literary experiments: the first *Twitter Fiction Festival*. In this paper, we explore how people who participated in the festival use tweeting to embrace and enact writing and reading literature as a social experience. The study includes a participant-centered inquiry based on two one-hour Twitter discussions with 14 participants from the *Twitter Fiction Festival* as well as analyses of their online literary works and secondary sources related to the festival. We show that festival participants self-identify based on their creative and social practices as artists rather than with traditional labels such as writer or author and are therefore drawn to social media environments.

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## Introduction

"As I began work on my new book, a non-fictional narrative of Lagos, and was paying more and more attention to daily life in the city, a peculiar thing happened. I found myself drawn to the 'small' news." (Cole, 2011)

The practice of tweeting has inspired various literary experiments: from Nigerian writer Teju Cole's *Small fates*, a non-fiction narrative of his hometown Lagos who created 140 characters at a time, to Jennifer Egan's novel "Black box", a shared tweet by tweet through the *New Yorker's* Twitter feed (@NYerFiction). In November 2012, Twitter, Inc. latched onto this trend by curating the first *Twitter Fiction Festival* (#TFF) with the help of its @TwitterBooks account. According to the account's manager, Andrew Fitzgerald, the intent of this five-day literary experience was to "showcase live creative experiments in storytelling created by participants from five continents and in five different languages" (Fitzgerald, 2012a). Projects like

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these, and the festival in particular, inspire researchers to consider how socially mediated practices, such as tweeting, are affecting how we experience what we read and write (Greenhow and Gleason, 2012).

One important change is the increase of a fragmented production of texts which can be enjoyed, much like short stories, in one sitting. As Henry Jenkins (2013) pointed out in his work *Textual poachers: Television fans and participatory culture*, a fragmented production of texts inspires readers to move in and out of different media environments in search of text snippets. As they engage in this process of gathering and assembling narrative elements, the readers' ownership of their literary experiences increases. In some cases, that ownership is increased even more by producing additional elements often labelled as fan fiction. In other artistic disciplines, like music production, this process has been studied from a producer's perspective (Baym, 2012; 2007; Baym and Burnett, 2009). In relation to literature, however, the implications of participatory culture for the literary producer have remained largely unattended. Nevertheless, popular discourse about literature in the digital age often associates practices such as fragmented reading, remixing and self-publishing with the demise of attentive reading, rich narratives and printed books (Soetaert, 2006; Striphas, 2011).

Another change that has inspired a pertinent question among scholars is the constant and almost ubiquitous stream of information enabled by the rise of digital media. In his essay *The lost art of reading*, Ulin (2010) explored how the buzz of society's social discourse and numerous digital experiments have affected the way we perceive and experience literary fiction. Based on his exploration, Ulin opposed the dominant view that both reading and writing fiction are practices 'best' performed and 'only' enjoyed in solitude. Formal education has long supported and helped to reproduce this dominant view where writing is seen as a solitary practice separated from reading, listening, and speaking (Eagleton, 1985). This view has effectively obscured many of the social processes by which literary work is created, spread, consumed and appreciated. However, as media scholar Jim Collins (2010) argued, digital media have extensively contributed to the ongoing transformation of our understanding of literary practices from "a thoroughly private experience ... [to] an exuberantly social activity" [1].

Writing and reading as social activities are not in any way "new" types of activities. However, with the rise of social media environments like Twitter, we are afforded with opportunities and challenges to perform these activities more often, in different ways, and with different actors in our social networks. Designers and developers of these social media contexts often claim that it is their intent to provide users with tools which support and potentially improve these practices (Vlieghe and Rutten, 2013). Standage (2013) pointed out that our activities within social media environments often "build upon habits and conventions that date back centuries" [2]. Though often not new, the intertwining of literary and social media practices and their ongoing development causes a shift in our understanding and attention towards literary experiences. Indeed, the growing body of academic work on social media and literary participation reports that social media practices seem to assist in enhancing the social experience of engaging with literary fiction (see Vlieghe, *et al.*, 2014; Vlieghe, *et al.*, 2016). Thus far, research has primarily focused on "social reading" or the technical aspects of writing and reading through social media (Holotescu and Grosseck, 2009; Ingleton, 2012). Few researchers, however, have focused on the "social writing" that is supported and potentially enhanced by social media.

Many scholars have stressed the importance of a social approach to literary studies. Such an approach considers writing and reading as overlapping and nonlinear social activities that support a relationship of mutual dependence between actors in the literary field (Tierney and McGinley, 1987). In her paper "Textual interpretation as collective action," Elizabeth Long (1992) argued that such an approach is crucial to gain a proper understanding of the social or institutional context that helps to determine the availability and worth of literary works, and provides instructions on how to perform literary activities such as reading and writing. In addition, literary scholars Daniel Allington and Joan Swann (2009) emphasized that this approach to literary studies requires empirical explorations of the practices and positions adopted by people in the social world surrounding literature. A social approach to literary studies thus takes into account the many social experiences related to writing and reading like literary festivals, book clubs, reading groups and parents and teachers reading to children as well as the more formal literary workshops.

Activities like the *Twitter Fiction Festival* create opportunities for social and situated learning by providing access to a multitude of discourses where people can express ideas, ask questions and create meaning through literary work or in relation to it (Teale and Sulzby, 1986; Wells, 1986; Goodman and Wilde, 1992). As such, writing and reading activities support

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Live What You Love

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the social and cultural development of a writer and readers (Graham, 2000). Furthermore, the social practices of writing and reading also serve as a system of identity-making and enculturation into the social life of a community as "fictions are the most powerful of all the architects of our souls and societies" [3]. This system of identity-making and enculturation involves a symbolic process that develops out of and in conjunction with talking, drawing and playing (Brindley and Schneider, 2002). As Jenkins (2006) argued, digital media have made it much easier, for experts and novices alike, to combine and experiment with various forms of representation. More importantly, however, Jenkins pointed out digital media have contributed to the rise of participatory culture where "rather than talking about media producers and consumers as occupying separate roles, we might now see them as participants who interact with each other according to a new set of rules that none of us fully understands" [4].

Much like the experiments and oral traditions of poets from the Middle Ages, today's writers explore the potential of different literary practices and narrative forms in social media environments. They seek and try out various methods to connect more directly and more deeply with readers and to evoke their senses. From a writer's perspective, this transformation involves adapting to the new spaces and infrastructures for experiencing literature, as well as renegotiating the various expectations that exist within society towards producers of literary texts [5]. One example of this transformation process, and the focus of this research, is literary writing and participation through Twitter. To explore the convergence of practices and people's roles in the production of literary work on social media, we focus on the practices and perceptions of festival participants during the first 2012 *Twitter Fiction Festival*. We analyze the features and affordances of microblogging for literary production and focus on two main questions: (1) what types of 'social writing' practices are being created through Twitter?, and (2) how does this affect the distribution of roles and acting possibilities for producers of literary fiction?

## Theoretical framework: Art as a social system

In the *Systems theory of art* Niklas Luhmann (2000) discussed artistic expression as a complex social system of interactions, artefacts and expressions that communicate the values existing within a specific social and historical context. As such, Luhmann was able to illustrate the social construction of art's meaning over time. He considers acts of communication — and not the actors (*i.e.*, individuals or organizations) — as the key elements that connect the social system, the artistic expressions (*e.g.*, novels, poems, paintings) and the utterances around it (*e.g.*, critic reviews, artist interviews). Through these acts of communication meaning and expectations are constructed within the system. Consider, for example, the oral tradition of poetry during the Middle Ages which we referred to earlier. Luhmann suggested that the materiality of "poetry was composed for oral presentation in a setting charged with social immediacy, rather than for solitary reading and print production" [6]. In contrast to poetry, "paintings (...) served as [visual] encyclopedias for the people, but their intelligibility depended on the viewer's prior familiarity with stories based on written narratives" [7].

Drawing from Luhmann's theory, Schmidt performed an extensive study of the modern literary culture as a social system. Based on this study, he determined that "the acting possibilities of actors in the social system of [print] literature are institutionally distributed onto four action [event] dimensions: production, mediation, reception, and post-processing" [8]. Within this social system of literary art, Schmidt placed writers primarily within the production dimension. The meaning of this modern role of "writers as producers" of literary work is derived from the practices and role expectations that writers are confronted with as literary creators. What it means to be a writer — or a reader, librarian, critic for that matter — is thus heavily dependent on the context.

Schmidt (2010) recognized the importance of the social and cultural context and notes that technological developments often affect how artistic creations are practiced and perceived. Standage (2013) noted that these changes do not necessarily involve the creation of completely new sets of practices and expectations. Instead, new technologies often reinvigorate and expand on older, often somewhat forgotten practices. As such, a medium can indeed become the message, as McLuhan (1964) famously stated. Media and media developments tell us something about how people in a given time frame create, communicate and perceive meaning. Ricardo (2009) argues that: "[w]hile human expressive force remains vibrant, electronic media have made it possible to create work that spans traditional distinctions at key junctures, to include the aesthetic and the poetic; the

entirely participatory and the entirely receptive; the act of narrative creation and that of real-time production" [9].

In this paper, we focus on how the characteristics of social media affect the production of literature as artistic and social expression, as well as our comprehension and expectation of its construction. We present a qualitative study of how participants of the *Twitter Fiction Festival* perceive their role(s) as literary producers in a social media environment and how they understand the meaning of their festival practices.



## Method

### *Identifying the field*

The study presented in this article focuses on the social media environment Twitter and the practices engaged in through tweeting. Over the past years, the field of social media research has greatly expanded and many studies have directed their attention to Twitter. Researchers quickly moved from describing Twitter and the phenomenon of tweeting (Krishnamurthy, *et al.*, 2008; Barnes and Böhringer, 2009; Huberman, *et al.*, 2009) towards examining tweeting practices in relation to particular activities. Among the most popular topics are tweeting for: political campaigning (Cetina, 2009; Waters and Williams, 2011; Bruns and Highfield, 2013; Park, 2013; Larsson and Moe, 2014; Graham, *et al.*, 2014; Sauter and Bruns, 2015), protesting (Galer-Unti, 2009; Lindgren, 2013; Penney and Dadas, 2014; Antonakis-Nashif, 2015), marketing (Jansen, *et al.*, 2009; Thoring, 2011; Burton and Soboleva, 2011; Kim and Ko, 2012; Swani, *et al.*, 2013; Nitins and Burgess, 2014; Jaring, *et al.*, 2015), and journalism (Murthy, 2011; Lasorsa, *et al.*, 2012; Broersma and Graham, 2013; Vis, 2013; Neuberger, *et al.*, 2014; Canter, 2015; Fahmy and Neumann, 2015; Papacharissi, 2016). The successful experiments of literary writers like Egan and Cole, as well as the 2012 and 2014 *Twitter Fiction Festival*, have also boosted academic interest in digital literary fiction. Current explorations of tweeting practices in relation to literary culture appear to focus primarily on issues of publication (Ingleton, 2012; Bay, 2014; Andersen, 2015), form (Rudin, 2011; Kuznetsova, 2014; Thomas, 2016, 2014; Bao-yu, 2015; Piredda, *et al.*, 2015) and amateur production (*i.e.*, fan fiction, see Thomas, 2011; Bay, 2014; Eate, 2015; Piredda, *et al.*, 2015). In this paper, we add a new dimension to this emerging field of research by studying the use of tweeting practices for literary communication from a literary producers' perspective. This allows us to examine how they perceive their own agency and the agency of others within the literary system in social media environments such as Twitter.

In November 2012, Twitter, Inc. curated the first *Twitter Fiction Festival* (#TFF) with the support of its @TwitterBooks account. The festival included 30 invited festival participants who had been selected based on proposal submissions reviewed by a panel of experts assembled by @TwitterBooks. The participants originated from five different continents and tweeted in various languages, including English, Spanish and French. In addition to the officially selected participants, other Twitter users were encouraged to participate as well and share their own writings through public invitations. Given its international, multicultural and multilingual character, the 2012 *Twitter Fiction Festival* presents an interesting case study.

### *Selecting the participants*

Considering the complicated and potentially intrusive nature of tracing and contacting these "regular" or leisure-time users (see Hine, 2000; 2005; Hine, *et al.*, 2009), we decided to draw exclusively from the experiences of the officially selected participants. We contacted all 30 official festival participants via e-mail or Twitter and received positive response from 21 participants. We explained to the participants that their participation in the research would involve focus group discussion mediated in real-time through Twitter. Organizing all this proved difficult, because most participants were located in different time zones and often had previously scheduled plans. Several participants dropped out, resulting in a remaining total of 14 participants (see [Appendix](#)). Each of these participants contributed to the mediated discussions. All participants agreed, and many even insisted on being identified by their full name or Twitter handle in all publications related to the study.

### *Collecting data*

We collected three types of data. The first group consists of insights and reflections shared by the participants during two focus group discussions, as well as observation notes recorded during those discussion sessions. The second group is compiled of screenshots and observation notes relating to

the participant profiles, network and online activity including — but not limited to — social media participation. The third group involves source material about the 2012 *Twitter Fiction Festival*, relating specifically to the participants' contributions during the festival.

The focus group discussions took place on Thursday 21 February and Friday 22 February 2013. Each session was curated in real-time over the period of one hour. Like the *Twitter Fiction Festival*, the discussions were set up in the social media environment of Twitter using the dedicated hashtag #TFFDiscuss. To inspire reflection and stimulate conversation, one researcher posted questions from a pre-designed list of questions while a second researcher observed and documented. Tweets from the participants were captured and recorded in real-time using the Twitter API search function and the #TFFDiscuss hashtag. In order to ensure that no data were lost due to improper use of the hashtag, the participants were also tracked individually during the discussion sessions. Using a pre-designed algorithm, the results returned by the Twitter API were streamed live into a Google Spreadsheet and later exported into an MS Excel spreadsheet for archiving, resulting in a total set of 526 tweets (Thursday  $n = 230$  tweets; Friday  $n = 296$  tweets). The observations resulted in a 3,684-word-field note document.

In addition to the focus group discussions, we also undertook a dialogical process of documenting the participants' profiles, network and online activity. This involved collecting data by visiting participants' Twitter profiles, documenting their tweeting practices and then following all hyperlinks provided in the profile descriptions. These links led us to personal or professional Web sites, Facebook profiles or Facebook pages, as well as to various other social mediated platforms. We combined these data with secondary material relating the participants' contributions during the *Twitter Fiction Festival*, in order to compile a rich descriptive narrative for each participant. We conducted this entire process through Skype whilst documenting our discussions and observations of evidence in a shared Google Doc. The final document consists of 19,463 words and 95 images.

#### *Analyzing the data*

Based on collected material, we analyzed how the participants perform, describe and reflect on their literary communication practices in social media environments. We focused primarily on the activities during the festival. In addition, however, we also assessed the participants' broader discussions about literary communication and literary production in particular, both in social media environments and traditional literary culture.

In order to facilitate this process, the tweets from the focus group discussions have been collected on two separate Storify docs, which are available at <http://storify.com/drkellypage/tffdiscuss-thursday> and <http://storify.com/drkellypage/tffdiscuss-friday>. In each Storify document, tweets were first grouped according to the order of the questions asked during the discussion. The tweets were then organized by the conversational sequence or order. The sequence and context around each tweet were checked to confirm the correct order by using the nested conversation function of Twitter. Afterwards, the order was checked again using the time stamps on tweets in the Google and MS Excel spreadsheets.

To analyze the data collected we developed five main themes that emerged from the discussion sessions based on a first reading of the collected information. Following that initial reading, we started a second round of analysis, focusing on grouped conversations and individual tweets. The analysis comprises of an iterative process: moving back and forth between the tweets and the conversations around them, as well as the rich descriptive narrative of each participant. We applied the five key themes and identified more detailed subthemes. The entire coding process was recorded in a MS Word document. To aid organization, we used the Word's paragraph-level and internal navigation function. This enabled us to create a thematic map with different levels for themes and subthemes, providing for easier navigation throughout the different forms of evidence. The following sections present the outline of this thematic map or narrative while combining representative examples and relevant insights from academic literature to show the richness and complexity of the data.



## **Discussion**

### *Author or artist*

Each discussion session started with a request for a short self-introduction by the participants. To emphasize the focus of the study, the request explicitly referred to descriptions in terms of authorship. The responses to

this question immediately revealed a contrast among the participants. On the one hand, several participants adhered to the terms "author" or "writer", which are traditionally used to refer to "producers of literary work" (see Schmidt, 1997). On the other hand, various participants problematized these labels and their connotations in light of the practices in which they engage as literary producers.

The first group descriptions consist of three types. Firstly, descriptions that use the traditional labels "author" or "writer". Secondly, descriptions that use traditional genre labels for classifying literary work. Thirdly, descriptions that use traditional audience labels for identifying targeted or intended readership. Some participants' descriptions present a combination of these different types. All of these descriptions represent and reproduce the dominant discourse related to print literature.

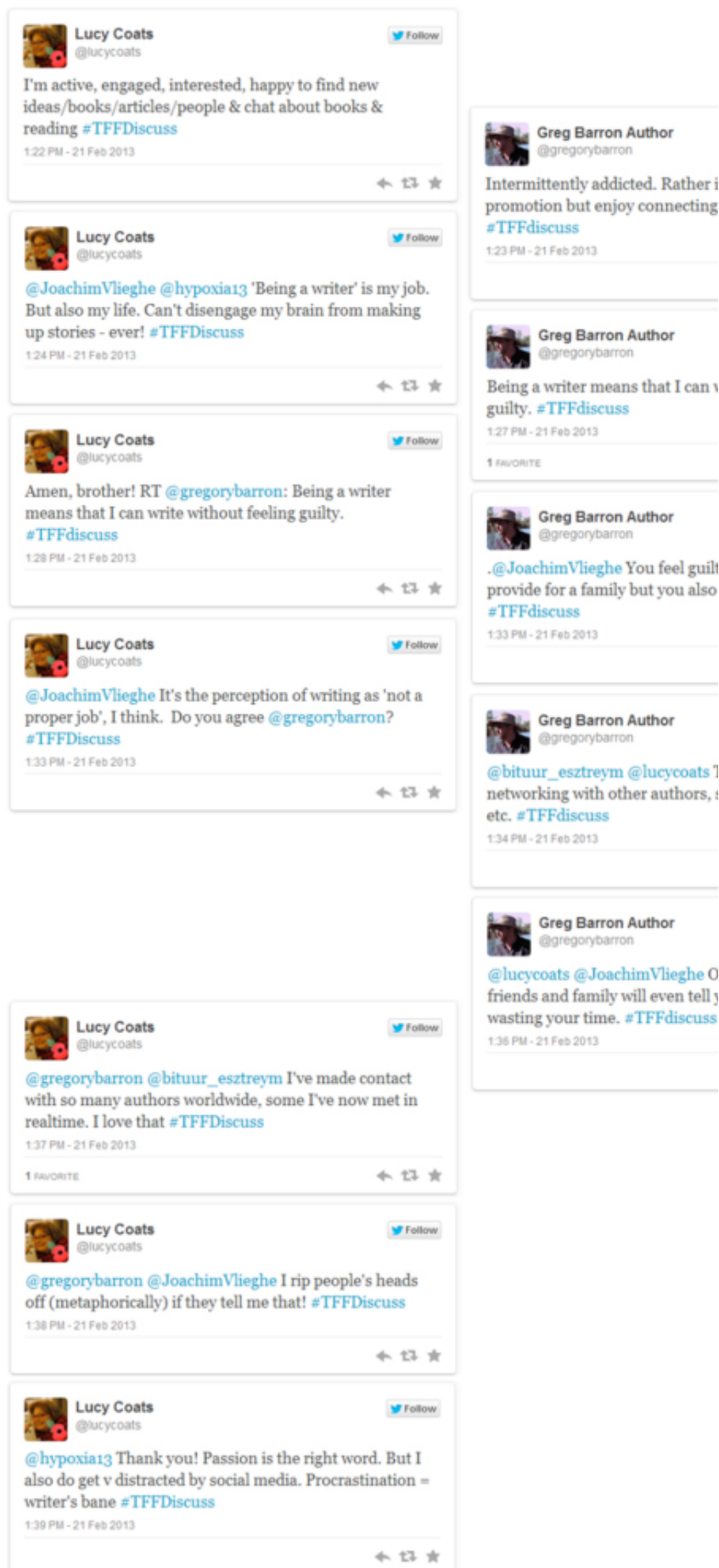


**Figure 1:** Examples of participants' self-descriptions in terms of tradition

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The participants recognize that these labels and self-descriptions also impose a number of limitations on literary producers, not only in relation to form and practice, but also socially. They feel that social media allow them to reach out and receive recognition for their work and engagement from others, both producers and recipients of literary fiction. Creating literary production is presented as a passion and related to a strong need to share. In addition, the *Twitter Fiction Festival* is also presented as a place to explore that passion and discover interesting experiments of others.



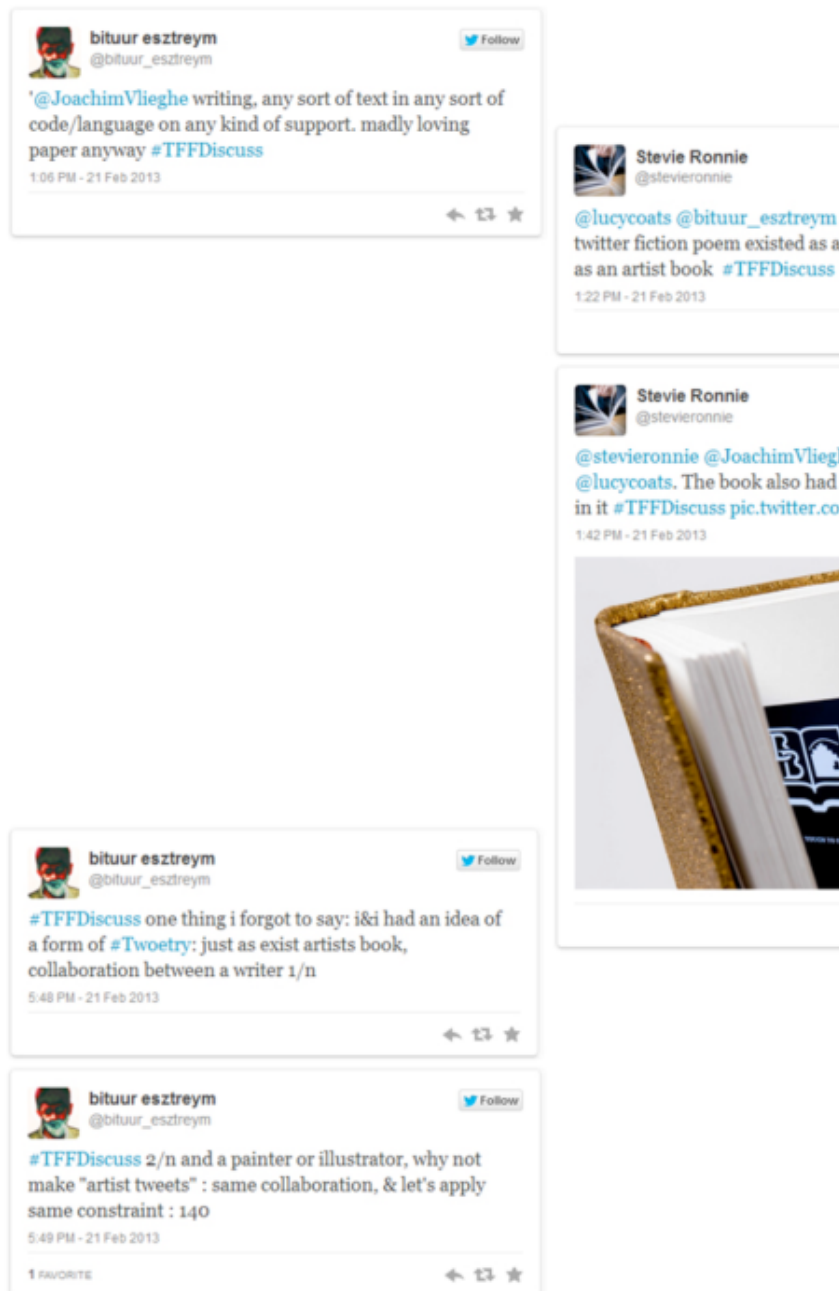


**Figure 2:** Discussion between Lucy Coats and Gregory Barron on the topic of soci

as a job".

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The second group of descriptions is more fluid and represents a negotiation for alternative labels based on creative practices. Various participants indicated that they find it hard to identify themselves through the labels "author" and "writer". They consider these labels to be restrictive because of the reference to a particular set of actions related to the production of print literature and exclusion of various creative digital practices. Like literary critic Ronald Barthes (1977), many participants feel that "it is language which speaks, not the author" [10]. As a consequence, they describe themselves as literary producers by describing the creative practices in which they engage.



**Figure 3:** Example and explanations of creative digital practices performed by Bituur esztrey. The image included is a visual outtake of Stevie Ronnie's contribution to the Twitter Fiction Festival, which formed the basis of his *Twitter Fiction Festival* contribution "e\_2012". Image retrieved from <https://twitter.com/stevieronnie/status/30457>



Note: Larger version of figure available [here](#).

Like linguist and literacy scholar Rosalind Ivanič (1998), the participants note that the context in which literary work is produced affects how it is shaped and experienced. In order to further question the use of traditional labels, participants Bituur Esztreym and Stevie Ronnie presented specific examples that would typically fall outside the scope of existing definitions or images of the "author" or "writer". As a way to address this problem, the participants propose alternative labels. Stevie and Bituur, on the one hand, suggest the label "artist" which is commonly used in other disciplines of the arts to denote producers of creative work. Mélodie Etxeandia, on the other hand, puts forward the label "player", which aligns with the description of her contribution to the 2012 *Twitter Fiction Festival* as a "game".



**Stevie Ronnie**

@stevieronnie

@JoachimVlieghe Usually 'writer', although when words disappear or the page / screen is less important I'd say 'artist'. #TFFDiscuss

1:07 PM - 21 Feb 2013



**Stevie Ronnie**

@stevieronnie

@JoachimVlieghe I'm not sure there is a difference perhaps it is useful for an audience to have an analogy. #TFFDiscuss

1:16 PM - 21 Feb 2013



@JoachimVlieghe @stevieronnie tough one. \*what\* is the guy with ciac.ca/sites/www.ciac... then?

BITUUR ESZTREYM @BITUUR\_ESZTREYM · 8 MONTHS AGO

REPLY RETWEET FAVORITE

**Figure 4:** Insight offered by Stevie Ronnie about the applicability and usefulness:

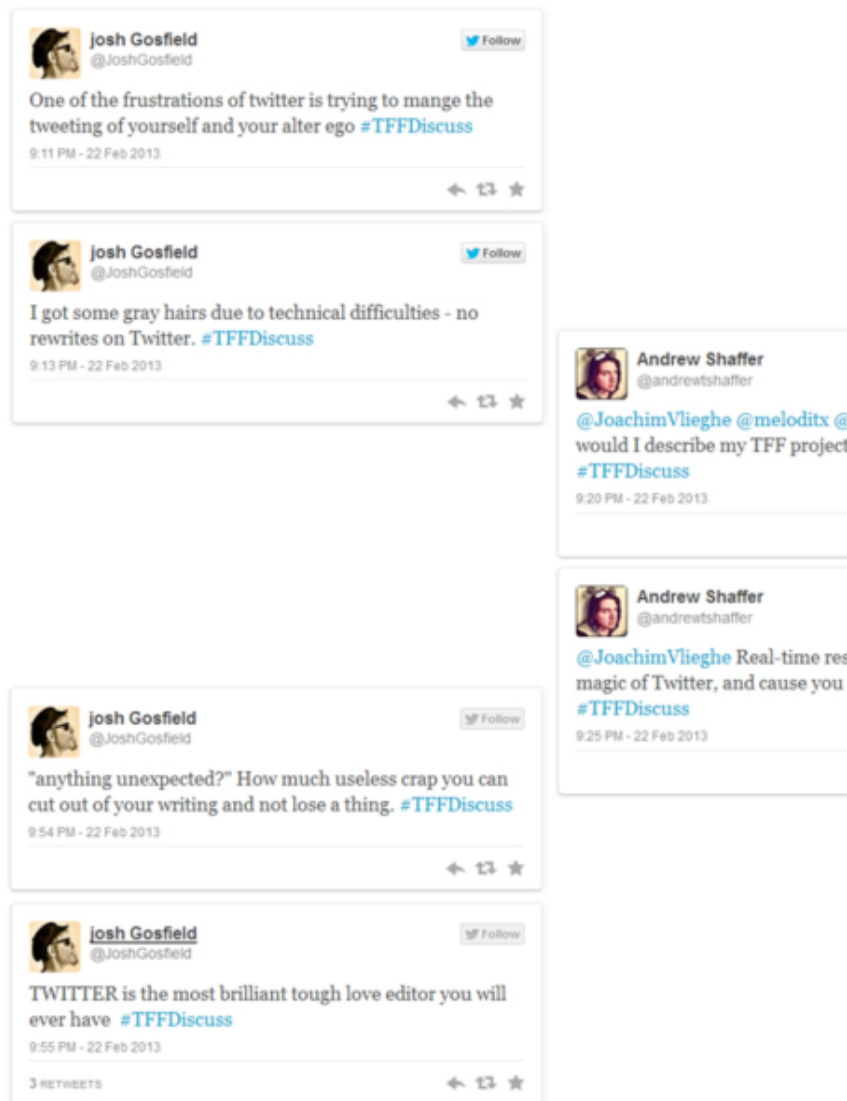
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### *Tweeting as literary production*

Like any art form, literature has many guises. In fact, literature has so many different appearances that it is hard to define it otherwise than "written artistic work". This can be anything from long prose narratives to one-word poems (Bókay, 1989) and even experimental texts containing an incomprehensible series of symbols and white space (Bernaerts, 2010). Though Andrew Fitzgerald (2012b) describes the selected works of the *Twitter Fiction Festival* as "a diverse array of creative experiments," the *Twitter Fiction Festival* does have a clear focus: fiction writing on Twitter. Literary experiments like the non-fiction narrative series "Small fates" from Teju Cole (2011) thus fall outside the scope of the festival. Indeed, data relating to the participants' contribution during the festival reveals literary texts in a wide variety of forms. Based on the participants' discussion of these texts and their conception, four characteristics can be identified in relation literary production on Twitter in general, and production during the 2012 *Twitter Fiction Festival* in particular. These characteristics are fragmentation, curation, responsiveness and playfulness.

### *Retrieving the practice of fragmented writing*

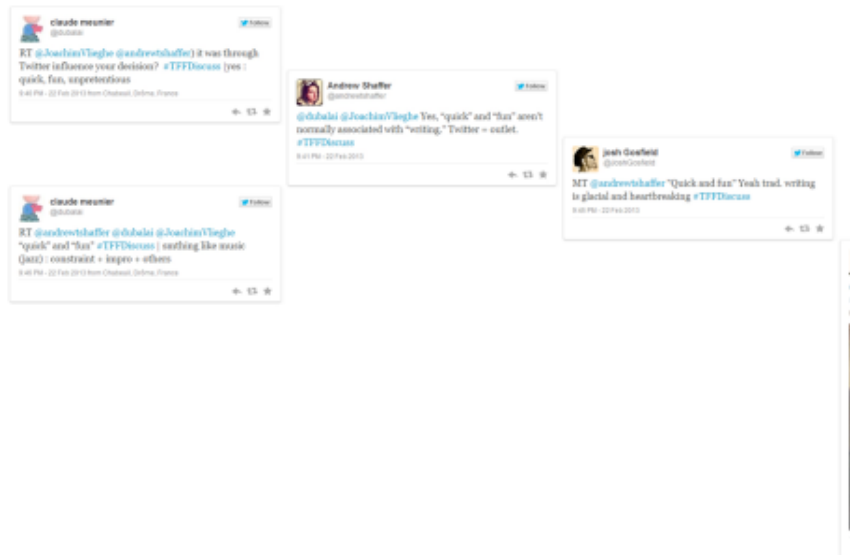
Fiction is published most frequently in a single volume or novel, but can also take form as short stories, flash fiction, fables, fairy tales, plays and poetry. In fact, some of the world's most famous long prose fiction narratives were first published as small fragments or instalments in literary periodicals, for instance *A tale of two cities* by Charles Dickens (Grubb, 1945). Fiction writing on Twitter mimics this kind of fragmented publishing as the length of individual tweets is restricted to 140 characters at a time. In addition, tweets are instantly shared in the Twitter environment once a user submits them by clicking the "publish" button. The participants explain how these features of Twitter challenge them to adapt their writing practices.



**Figure 5:** Insights and reflections offered by Josh Gosfield and Andrew Shaffer "instantaneousness" of tweeting.

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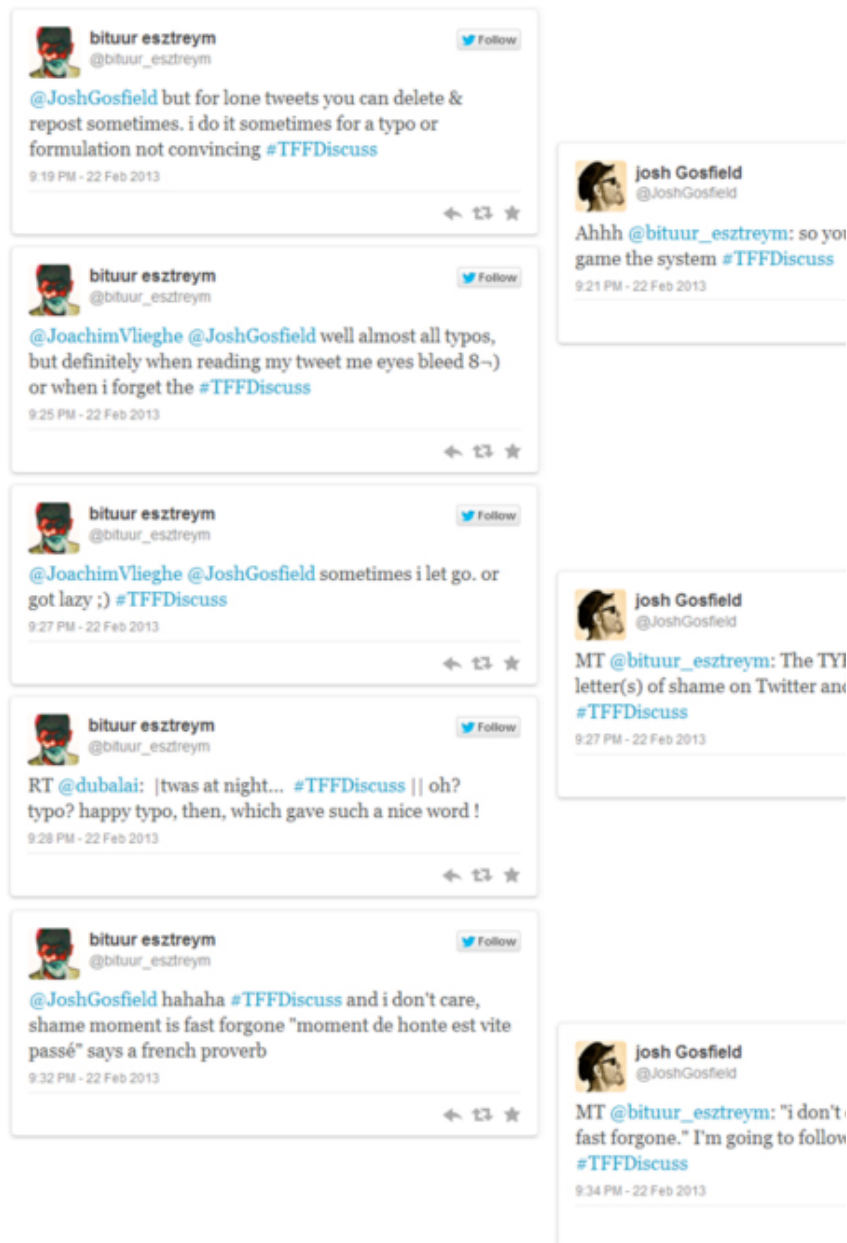
Several participants refer to these challenges as the main difference between tweeting and traditional writing. Furthermore, they describe tweeting as quick, fun and unpretentious. In contrast, they describe traditional writing as a craft that requires a lot of time and hard work. Traditional writing as a form of literary communication is said to be cold, lonely and heart breaking. The participants also express this idea through the image of *The poor poet* (Spitzweg, 1839). As such, they confirm the dominant perception of traditional literary communication as a solitary practice (also see Eagleton, 1985; Long, 1992).



**Figure 6:** Discussion between Claude Meunier, Andrew Shaffer, Josh Gosfield and topic of traditional writing versus tweeting. The image shared by Bituur is a digital painting *The poor poet* (1839).

Note: Larger version of figure available [here](#).

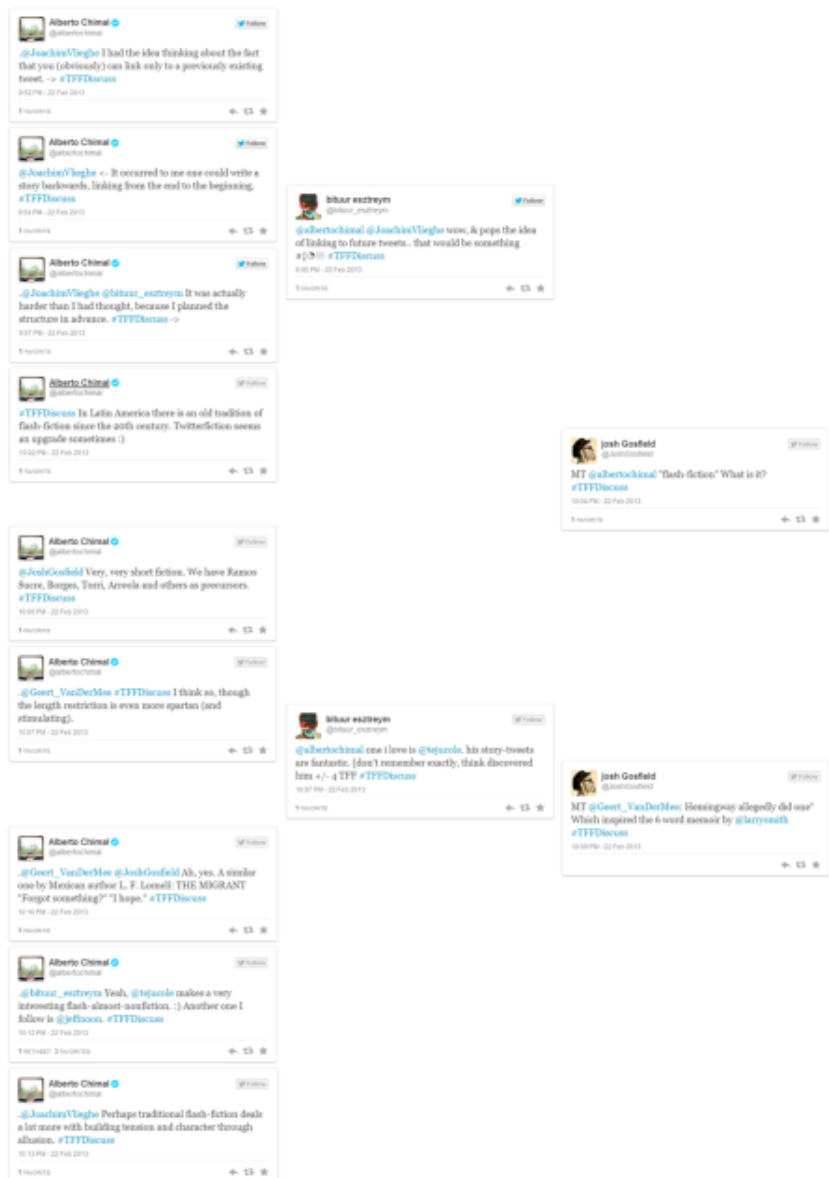
Though tweeting is described as “quick” and “fun”, the participants still indicate the need to put time, thought and consideration into it. By providing details about their creative process, the participants point out that tweeting can actually involve rewriting and careful planning. This results in two interesting conversations about adaptation through literary practice. The first conversation relates to spelling and grammatical errors and the value that is attached to them in terms of shame or poetic potential (see [Figure 7](#)). The second conversation relates to literary genres and traditions and how they can be adopted and adapted in social media environments (see [Figure 8](#)).



**Figure 7:** Discussion between Bituur Esztreym and Josh Gosfield on the topic of errors and the value that is attached to them in terms of shame or poe

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**Figure 8:** Discussion between Alberto Chimal, Bituur Esztreyrn, Josh Gosfield and I of literary genres and traditions and how they can be adopted and adapted in social media.

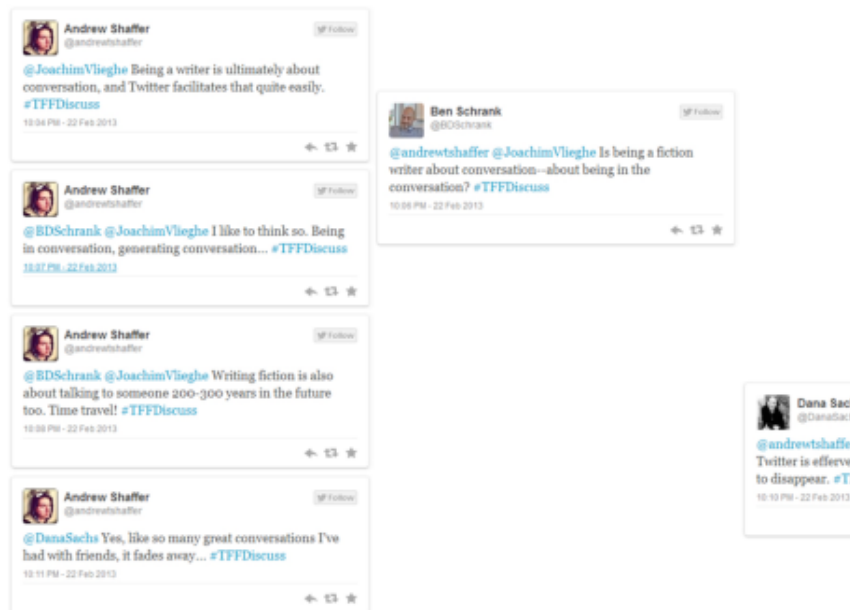
Note: Larger version of figure available [here](#).

### Obsolescing opportunities for curating literary narratives

Analysis of the participants' contribution to the focus group discussions has indicated that the participants of the 2012 *Twitter Fiction Festival* have a desire to guide or curate readers' literary experiences. Like Alberto Chimal, many other participants perform their creative practice in terms of planning and structuring of a reading path. These discussions touch upon both the challenges and opportunities presented in this respect by the Twitter environment. The absence of synchronicity and the variety of entry points in the narrative are simultaneously problematized and celebrated.

According to the participants, the main problem is presented by the focus of Twitter's design on real-time experiences. Twitter's design is said to interfere with the flow of the narrative. Indeed, Twitter's newsfeed represents an endless live stream which combines unrelated text messages that originate from thousands of different sources (see also Gruz, *et al.*, 2011). These messages are automatically organized in reverse chronological order (boyd, *et al.*, 2010). Like Twitter's search function that only retrieves tweeted messages up to seven days old, the newsfeed favors recent activities. This makes it difficult for readers to trace the different fragments of the narrative or for the literary producers to attract the attention of new readers. Again, the participants compare tweeting and

traditional writing.



**Figure 9:** Discussion between Andrew Shaffer, Ben Schrank and Dana Sachs on curating or partaking in a conversation.

Note: Larger version of figure available [here](#).

At the same time, the real-time aspect of Twitter's design is also praised by some participants. Their praise focuses on the opportunities to create anchor points that allow readers to navigate from fragment to fragment. Indeed, Twitter's design presents a number of interesting opportunities to create links between fragments and thus to create a networked structure. As pointed out by the Alberto Chimal project for the 2012 *Twitter Fiction Festival*, individual tweets have a unique URL address (see [Figure 12](#)). This allows literary producers to create direct links between fragments, thereby creating a reading path. Other design elements include the mentioning, retweeting and hashtagging functions which allow literary producers to create conversations (see [boyd, et al., 2010](#)). In addition to creating a networked archive of messages (see [Figure 13](#)), these functions also allow the combination of multiple accounts or voices (see [Figure 14](#)). As such a "multidimensional realtime" can be created, as Bituur Esztreym explains. While the practices of the participants' showcase attempts to add structure and linearity to the fragmented narrative, their reflections suggest that this is done mainly to create multiple entry points and thus multiple reading paths.

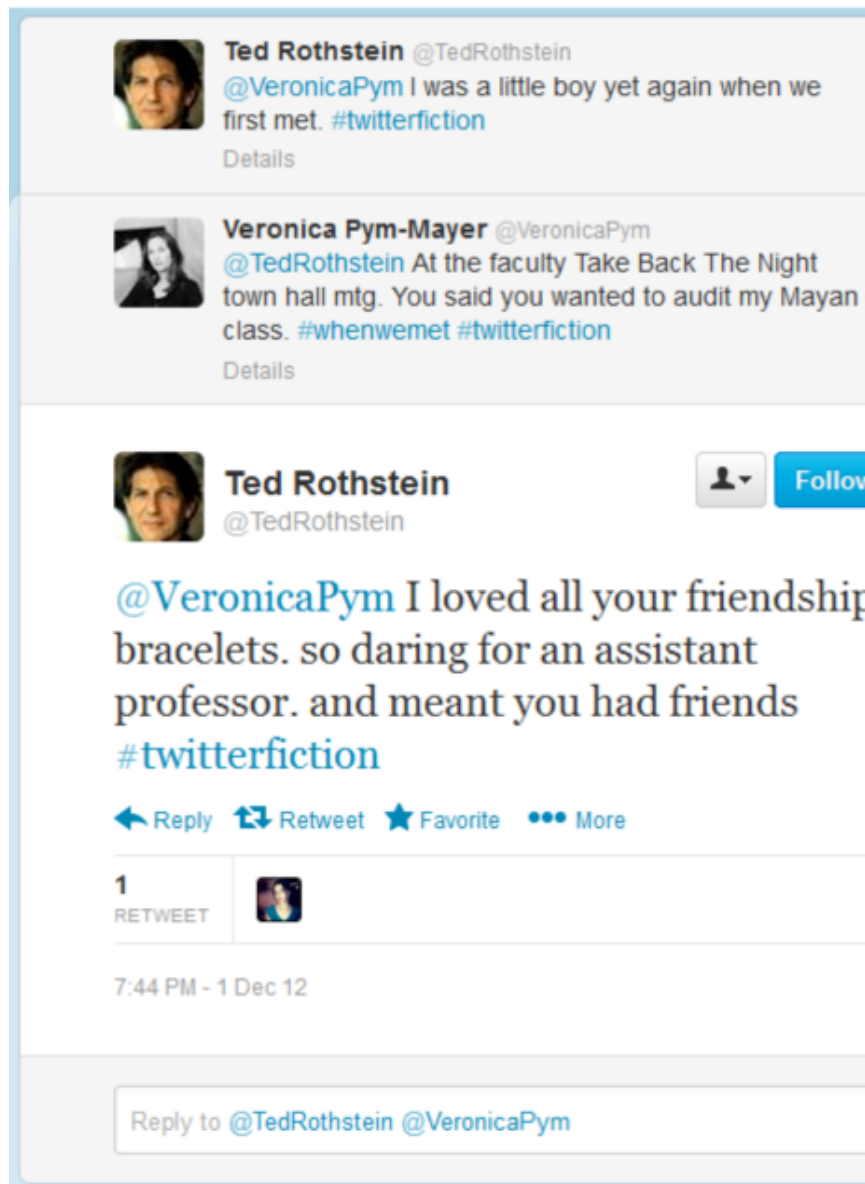


**Figure 10:** Tweet as part of "MuchoPasados" (Chimal, 2012), the *Twitter Fiction* contribution of Alberto Chimal, shared through his Twitter alter ego Horacio Kustos retrieved from <https://twitter.com/hkustos/status/2736689266830868>





**Figure 11:** Sonnet composed of a series of tweets and retweets as part of the #TwitterFictionFestival (Paris, et al., 2012), the *Twitter Fiction Festival* contribution of Joseph Paris, Claude Meunier and Bituur Esztreym, shared through their respective Twitter accounts. Retrieved from <http://twittrature.tumblr.com/post/36873515587> (weblog has been



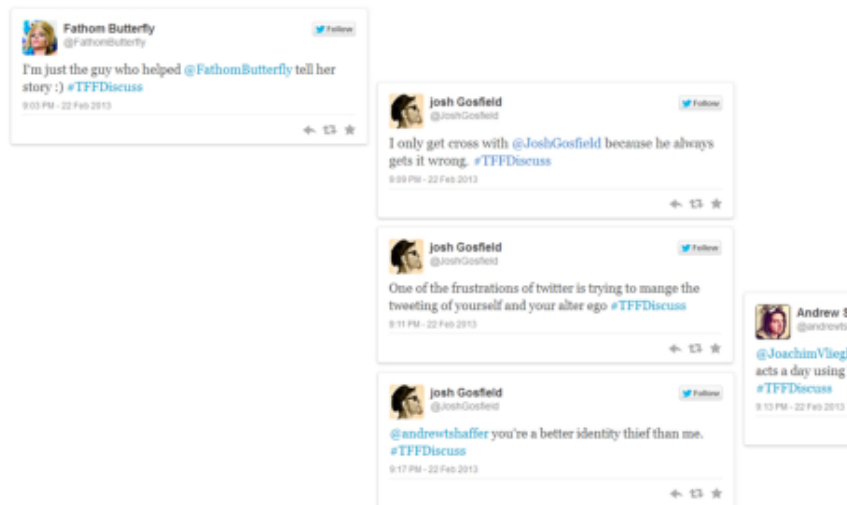
**Figure 12:** Tweets and retweets as part of "All aboard the HMS Astute" (Schrack 2012), the *Twitter Fiction Festival* contribution by Ben Schrank and Lauren Mecl through their respective Twitter alter egos Ted Rothstein and Veronica Pym-Mayer retrieved from <https://twitter.com/TedRothstein/status/27494709763835>

*Reversing literary communication from solitary writing practice to responsive performance*

Literary production and reception have been part of shared real-time experiences for many centuries. As Ong (2012) argues, literary texts were communicated orally before the introduction and commodification of books. It was only after books had become popular and easy to produce that printed text became the dominant means to communicate literary text. Regardless, literary communication practices continue to have a performance aspect as authors still write their texts for an audience (Ong, 2012; see also Bauman, 1984), and often even perform these texts live during author readings. Nonetheless, literary production is rarely seen as an act of performance, as is clear from the image of the solitary writer.

Based on the reflections of the participants, the practice of tweeting and Twitter's focus on real-time experiences appears to reverse that perception, stressing the performance aspect of literary production. This includes the embodiment of characters or voices as well as responsiveness towards the audience — *i.e.*, the readers. Ben Schrank's narrative of the Rothstein family is an example of embodiment. Another example discussed more extensively during the focus group sessions is Josh Gosfield's embodiment of @FathomButterfly in his *Twitter Fiction Festival* contribution "Memoir in

tweets" (Gosfield, 2012). Josh describes the character of @FathomButterfly as his alter ego. In addition, he also presents @JoshGosfield — i.e., his own voice — as a character in the story. Similarly, Andrew Shaffer states that he "manage[s] three or more acts a day" thereby also referring to his own @andrewtshaffer Twitter account "as an act or a character".

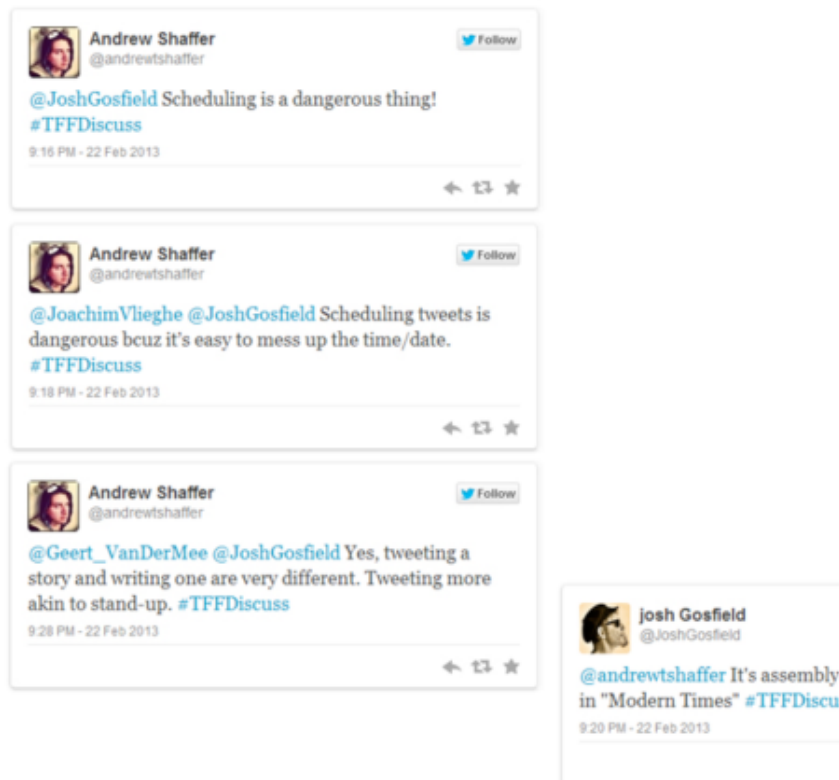


**Figure 13:** Conversation between Josh Gosfield and his Twitter alter ego Fathom I reflections on managing Twitter alter egos and Andrew Shaffer's re

Note: Larger version of figure available [here](#).

Josh's attempt and failure to embody both @JoshGosfield and @FathomButterfly (see [Figure 13](#)) inspires another conversation planning and structuring. In this case, the conversation focuses on the danger of automated tweeting and the lack of responsiveness. Andrew explains that the real-time and multidimensional nature of the Twitter environment necessitates flexibility and improvisation. He contrasts tweeting and traditional writing by referring to tweeting as stand-up comedy or improvisation art. In support of Andrew's plea for sensitivity to contextual changes, Josh introduces an image from the movie *Modern times* to suggest the disastrous effects of scheduled or automated tweeting. A conversation between Lucy Coats and Bituur Esztreyim presents a similar contrast. Bituur argues that a moment of delay in the traditional production process gives the literary producer the opportunity to take control of the situation. Instead, he observes that the directness of speaking "has you coping with conditions of expression at that moment" and "yourself is what you express".

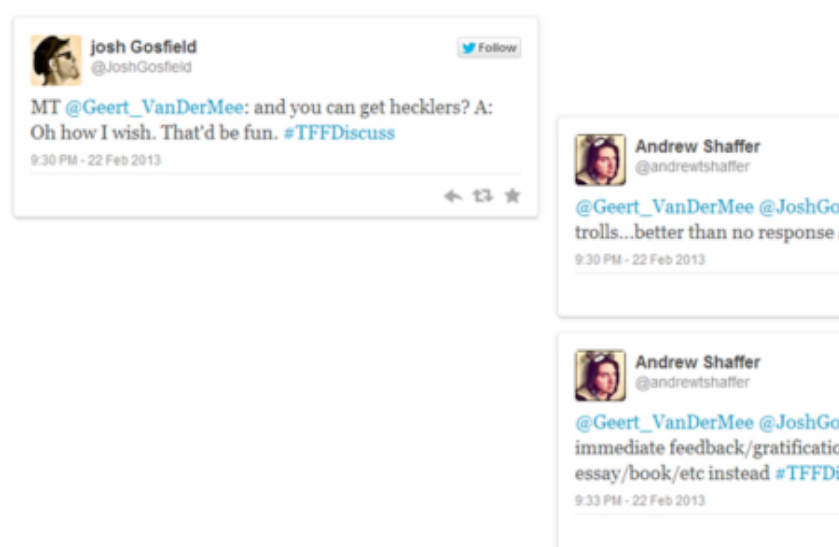




**Figure 14:** Discussion between Andrew Shaffer and Josh Gosfield on the topic of social media environments such as Twitter.

Note: Larger version of figure available [here](#).

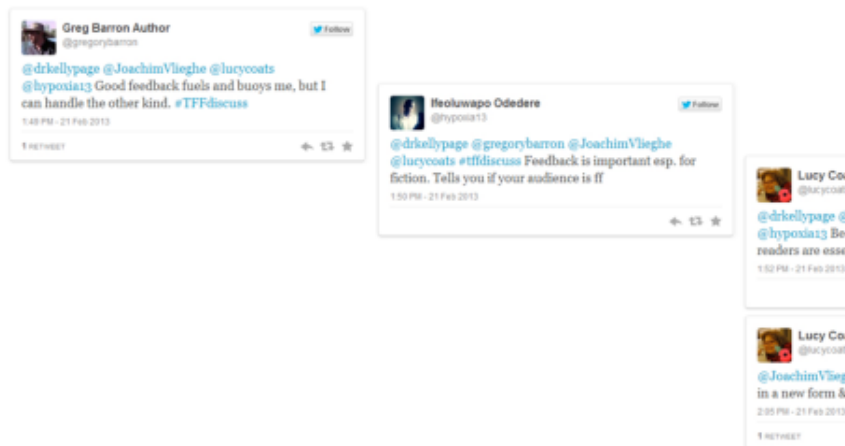
The metaphor of "tweeting as stand-up" also supports a discussion about reader responses or reception and interaction with the audience. Both Josh and Andrew indicate that the opportunity to interact with readers represents a major attraction point of Twitter. This resonates with how other participants express their interest in Twitter and the 2012 *Twitter Fiction Festival*. There are, however, distinct differences in how the relation between producer and recipient is perceived by the participants. This has become apparent from the participant's contributions to the 2012 *Twitter Fiction Festival* and their reflections regarding the goal and design of these contributions.



**Figure 15:** Discussion between Josh Gosfield and Andrew Shaffer on the topic of social media environments such as Twitter.

Note: Larger version of figure available [here](#).

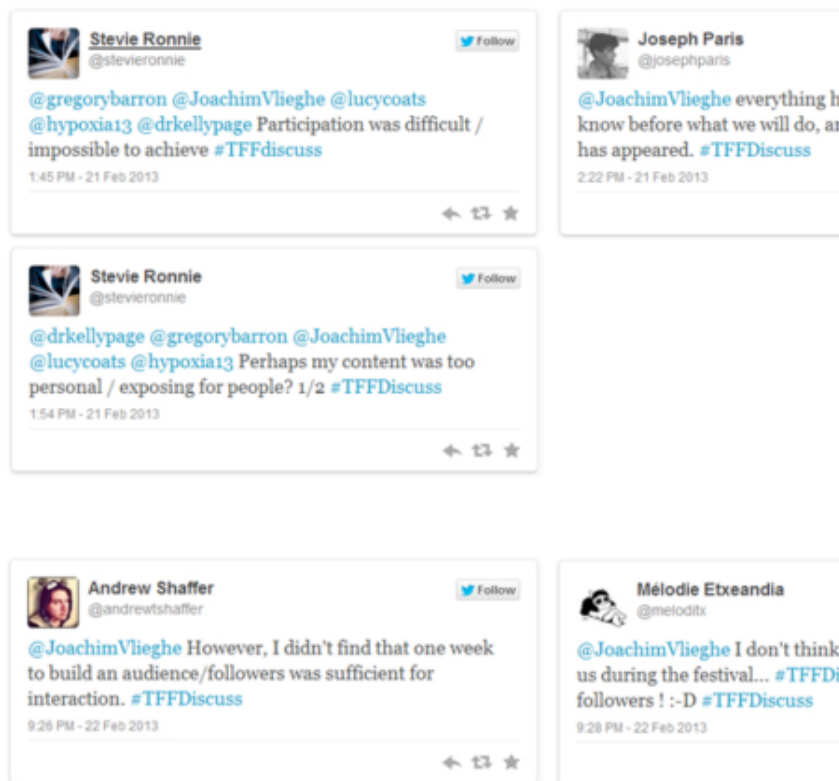
The different approaches to interaction and literary production are often reflected in the design of the participants' creative work featured at the festival. A first approach involves the use of a detailed script or a pre-existing text. The readers are described as "audience" and a sounding board. Here, reflections regarding interaction mostly refer to "feedback" and encouragement. This is the case for Gregory Barron's "Around the world in 80hrs", Ifeoluwapo Odedere's "#noLight — A satire" and Lucy Coats' "100 myths in 100 tweets".



**Figure 16:** Insights offered by Gregory Barron, Ifeoluwapo Odedere and Lucy Coats on the importance of audience feedback.

Note: Larger version of figure available [here](#).

A second approach involves creative work that relies on improvisation. This type of work is often presented as live performance. Participants involved in this kind of work often discuss interaction in terms of "connection". Connection then refers to the intent to prompt readers to share their thoughts and feelings about the work. Examples of such work featured at the festival are Stevie Ronnie's "e\_l\_l\_i\_p\_s\_i\_s", Andrew Shaffer's "Proud zombie mom", and the #TwitRature project of Joseph Paris, Claude Meunier, Mélodie Etxeandia and Bituur Esztreyim. It is interesting to note that each of these examples was started up several months prior to the festival and continued during the festival to showcase the work to new readers — *i.e.*, establishing new connections. For each of these examples, the participants note that it was difficult to establish these new connections.



**Figure 17:** Reflections by Stevie Ronnie, Mélodie Etxeandia, Andrew Shaffer and of audience engagement in light of their *Twitter Fiction Festival* con

Note: Larger version of figure available [here](#).

A third approach relies on improvisation, but focuses heavily on the interaction in terms of "participation". Dana Sachs's "The Stone Soup literary dinner party" and Lauren Beukes' "#Litmash" are examples of this approach. Both examples rely primarily on prompts from their readers. Hence, interaction plays a crucial role in these projects, as is also reflected in their announcement on the Twitter blog (Fitzgerald, 2012b). In addition to these invitations on the Twitter blog, Dana and Lauren also personally invited participation via Twitter and other digital platforms. For Lauren, who already had a wide network on Twitter, establishing interaction appeared to present few problems. For Dana, who was relatively new to Twitter, it was much more difficult to engage other Twitter users. She concludes that it is a misconception to believe that people on Twitter are inclined to "participate naturally".

"Come to dinner with Dana Sachs (@DanaSachs), who will be working with different literary characters to serve up Stone Soup, a celebration of great writing and (perhaps) truly bizarre food. Saturday at 8pm EST (01:00 GMT) [...] Writing from South Africa, author Lauren Beukes (@laurenbeukes) will challenge herself to write #LitMash stories: taking incongruous community suggestions (the weirder the better!) and telling a story that matches them. Wednesday, Thursday and Friday at 10am EST (15:00 GMT)" (Twitter blog, 2012b)

"Tomorrow: Stone Soup #ltdinner at #twitterfiction fest. Characters come with grub they love. 12/1 8-10 pm EST More at <http://ow.ly/fJcwY>" (Tweet by Dana Sachs, retrieved from <https://twitter.com/DanaSachs/status/274706978465542144>)

"I'm inviting all readers and writers to make the party a tribute to our love of literature by tweeting contributions to the hashtag #ltdinner. (If you can't get involved at exactly that time, don't worry! The dinner has started already and will continue at #ltdinner after the showcase period ends.)" (Blog post by Dana Sachs, retrieved from [http://www.danasachs.com/index2.php#!/LATEST\\_NEWS](http://www.danasachs.com/index2.php#!/LATEST_NEWS))

"#litmash is now open for suggestions! Hit me with your craziest

genre/style mash-ups for the story I have to write #twitterfiction"  
(Tweet by Lauren Beukes, retrieved from  
<https://twitter.com/laurenbeukes/statuses/273804000053309440>)

"I'll be running #Litmash, a Tweet-sized story writing-game that relies on incongruous genre/style literary mash-ups. Everyone can play! (...) It's open to everyone, so please play along and write your own in 114 characters (plus the hashtags #twitterfiction #litmash)." (Blog post by Lauren Beukes, retrieved from  
<http://laurenbeukes.bookslive.co.za/blog/2012/11/28/litmash-at-the-twitter-fiction-festival/>)



**Figure 18:** Reflections by Dana Sachs on the topic of audience engagement in light of the Twitter Fiction Festival contribution. Tweet retrieved from <https://twitter.com/danasachs/status/305051530095112192>.

#### *Enhancing playful experimenting with literary communication practices*

New media often inspire producers of creative work to experiment with forms and conventions. Lev Manovich (2001) argues that "the task of avant-garde new media artists today is to offer alternatives to the existing language of computer media". [11] In the call for participation in the 2012 *Twitter Fiction Festival* (Fitzgerald, 2012a), that notion of avant garde art and experimentation is also associated with content production through Twitter. The Twitter environment is presented as "a frontier for creative experimentation", while participants are invited "to push the bounds of what's possible with Twitter content" either by exploring existing content formats or by creating new ones (see Figure 23). Most participants agree that this is what attracted them most in the festival. They describe their interest in the festival in terms of experimentation and personal challenges, but also in terms of curiosity and inspiration.





Twitter is a place to tell stories. Often those stories are about news, or perhaps sports or music, but it turns out Twitter is a great place for tell stories, too. As one professor from Michigan State University [says](#), "Twitter thought of as a new literary practice." We want to celebrate that.

At the end of November, we'll host a five-day Twitter Fiction Festival — storytelling celebration held entirely on Twitter. The Twitter Fiction Festival ([#twitterfiction](#)) will feature creative experiments in storytelling from all over the world.

Twitter has hosted great experiments in fiction already, from Jennifer Egan to Teju Cole's "[Small Fates](#)" to Dan Sinker's [@mayoremanuel](#). And Twitter has inspired [some literary criticism](#).

Now we want to go further! Twitter is a frontier for creative experimentation. We want to invite authors and creative storytellers around the world to push the boundaries of what's possible with Twitter content.

If you'd like to take part in the Twitter Fiction Festival, [submit your idea](#). You are going to explore content formats that already exist on Twitter: Tweets, a Twitter chat, live-tweeting — or, even better, how you'll create content. You will work with our real-time global platform, where anyone can contribute to the story at any moment? The proposal must fit into the time window of one week — but that means that a project could run for the length of the festival or a single hour.

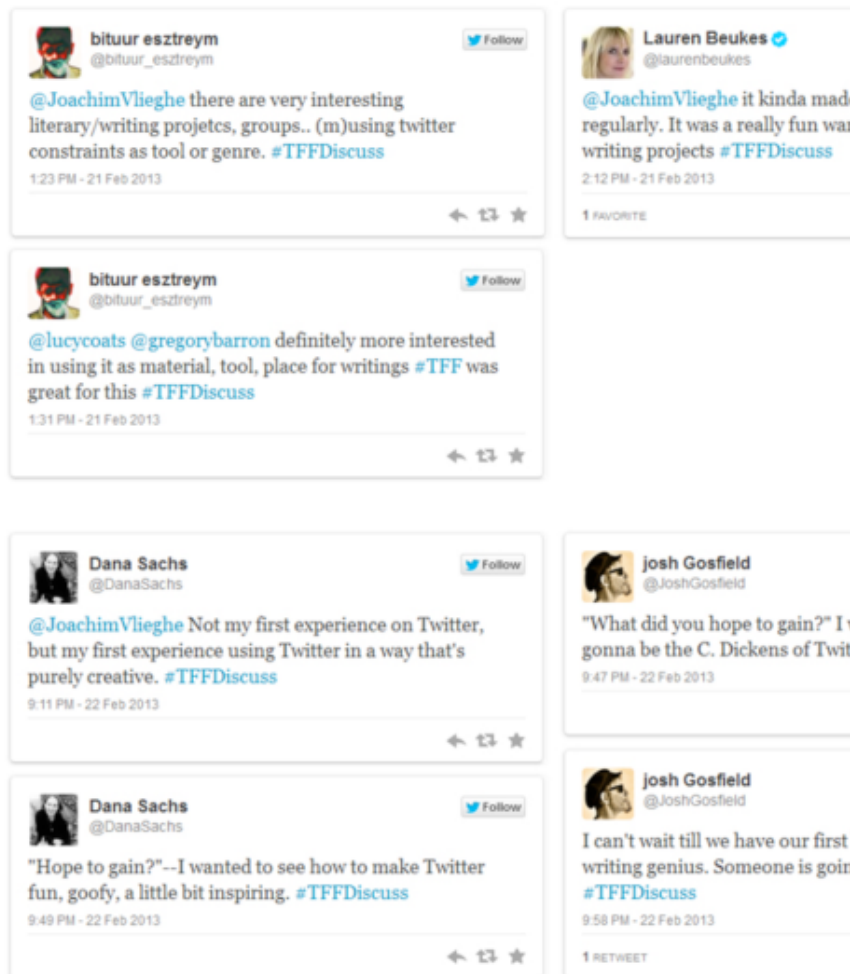
We'll announce the selected authors and festival agenda on Monday, November 26th, and the festival itself will kick off on November 28th. We look forward to reading your stories.

Posted by Andrew Fitzgerald - [@magicandrew](#)  
Editorial Programming, Media Team

**Figure 19:** Announcement and call for proposals of the Twitter Fiction Festival 2012. Twitter blog. Blog post retrieved from <https://blog.twitter.com/2012/announcing-the-twitter-fiction-festival>

The call for participation appealed to the curiosity of the participants, most of whom had already discovered Twitter as a place to discover inspiring experiments. Various participants indicate that they had identified the 2012 *Twitter Fiction Festival* as an opportunity to become familiar with the various ways in which literary communication practices can be adopted and adapted in social media environments. Earlier, we presented an outtake from the participants' discussions that is equally relevant here. During that discussion Stevie Ronnie expresses his interest in "how things can exist on many platforms". Stevie recognizes that any form of communication,

including literary communication, requires unique design choices that depend on the context of the medium (see also Kress, 2004). The participants note that contemplating these design issues presented an interesting and inspiring challenge as well as an opportunity to learn from the choices of others.

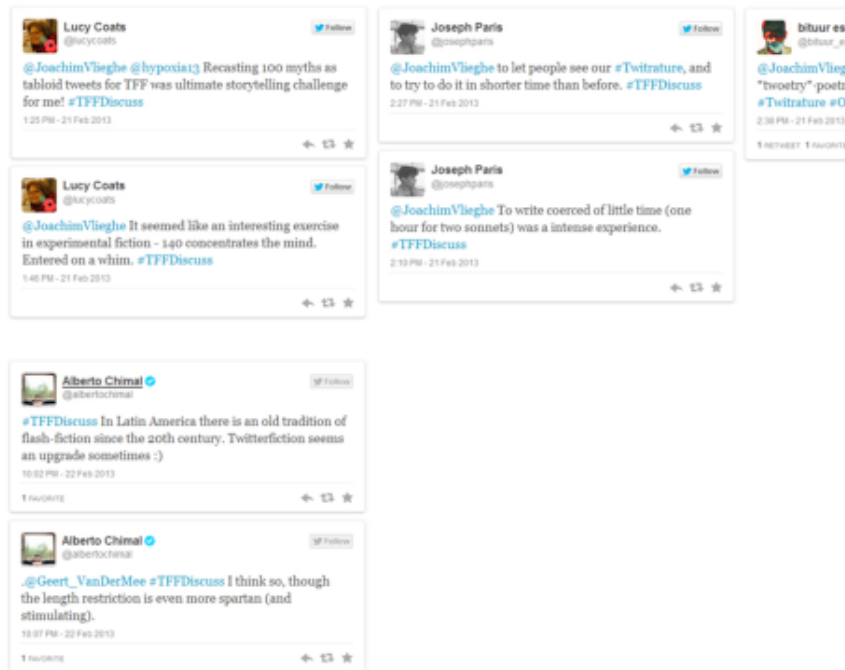


**Figure 20:** Reflections offered by Bituur Esztreyim, Lauren Beukes, Dana Sachs a topic of experimentation and inspiration in social media environments si

Note: Larger version of figure available [here](#).

The participants frequently refer to their contribution to the festival as a "challenge" and describe it as a "fun" and "surprising" learning experience, as is clear from earlier remarks noted in this paper. This suggests that participants introduced a certain degree of playfulness in their contributions. Indeed, for many participants the *Twitter Fiction Festival* presented an opportunity to play with constraints such as character and time restrictions. Though most participants refer to the same constraints, the design of their projects indicates a different focus. Lucy's project "100 myths in 100 tweets", for instance, focuses on the adaptation of existing content. Other projects focused on the adaptation of existing literary genres, like flash fiction in the *MuchoPasados* project or sonnets in the *#Twittrature* project.





**Figure 21:** Reflections offered by Lucie Coats, Joseph Paris, Bituur Esztrey and topic of constraints and playfulness in social media environments such

Note: Larger version of figure available [here](#).

The references to literary tradition through content and genre provide support for observation that practices in social media environments often rely on existing forms of expression and communication (see Standage, 2013; Ingleton, 2012). Participant Bituur Esztrey even points out that this also applies to the practice of playful experimentation through rules and constraints. He explicitly compares this practice with a French literary movement and practice form the 1960s known as *OuLiPo* or "Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle" (see Queneau, 1961; Perec, 1972; 1969). Using the term "OuTwPo", Bituur and his colleagues Claude and Mélodie embed the #Twittrature project in the tradition of this avant garde movement. At the same time, they also use the term to indicate that the practices and techniques are not just imitated, but specifically designed and adapted to the medium of Twitter.



**Figure 22:** Explanation by Bituur Esztrey of the relationship between "Twoetry" practices of the literary movement known as "OuLiPo". Tweet retrieved [https://twitter.com/bituur\\_esztrey/status/305053629478469632](https://twitter.com/bituur_esztrey/status/305053629478469632).

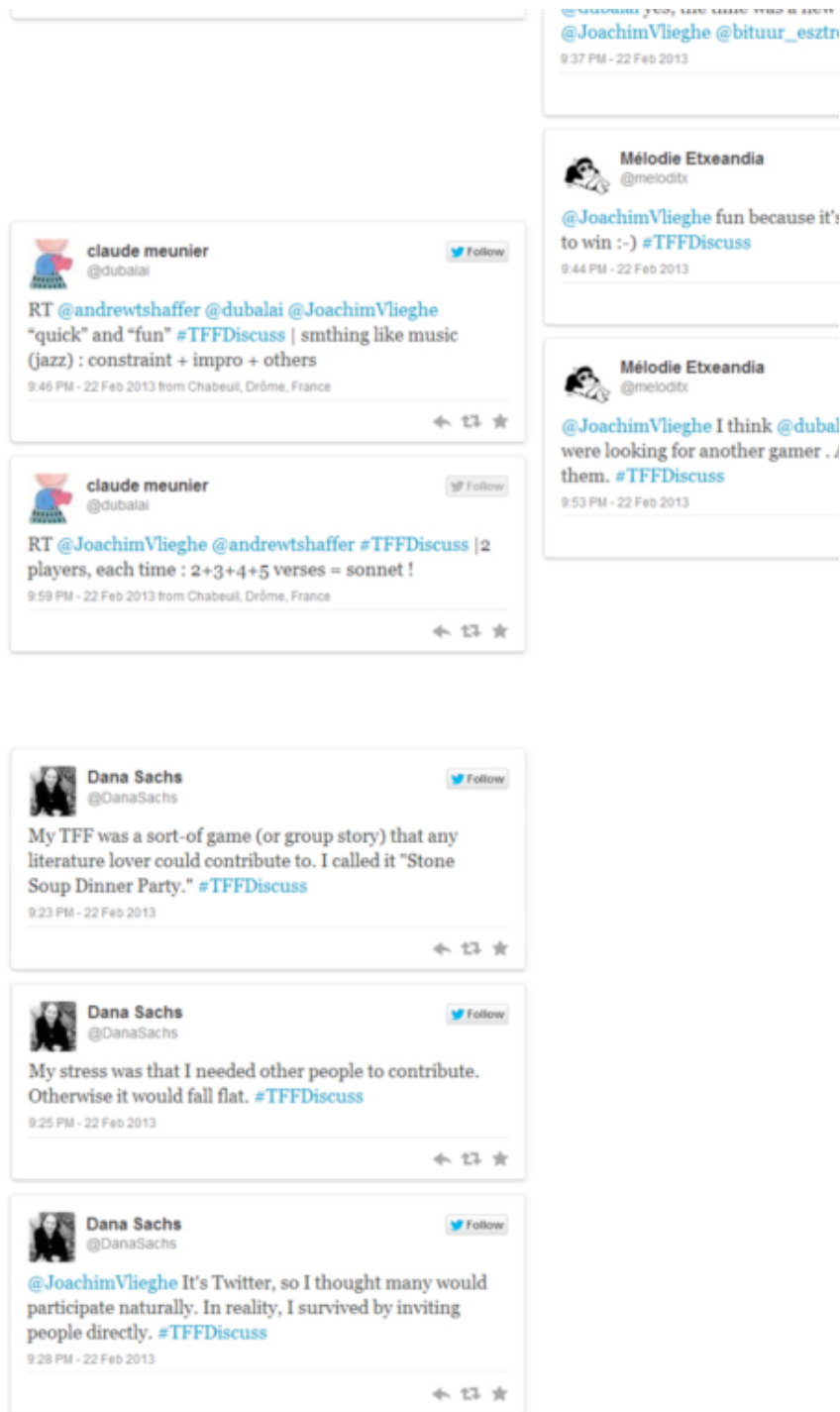
In some cases playfulness was maximized by referring to projects in the *Twitter Fiction Festival* as "outlets" and "games". The term "outlet" comes up in relation to Andrew's project "Proud zombie mom" and Alberto's project *MuchoPasados*. The term "game" is used to refer to the #Litmash project of Lauren, Dana's "The Stone Soup literary dinner party" project and the #Twittrature project from Bituur, Joseph, Claude and Mélodie. Both terms are used to express a desire to experiment and a need to interact with others. In nearly all cases the experiments involve improvisation, with the exception of *MuchoPasados*. In relation to interaction, however, each case appears to be quite different. For Alberto, who talks about his project in terms of an "outlet", the interaction with others consists of sharing his writing quickly with a broader audience. Andrew also sees his contribution as an opportunity to reach out to new readers, but considers how to include elements from the context like reader responses. Bituur, Joseph, Claude and Mélodie describe themselves as players who take turns and respond. The *Twitter Fiction Festival* gave them the opportunity to showcase this process of creative collaboration as well as to make it a more intense experience. Lauren also presents her project as a game, where she is challenged by readers providing her with inspirational prompts. Dana takes this one step further by engaging the readers as co-authors in her writing game. The first three projects are dependent on the input and creativity from the literary producers, while participation from the readers is pivotal in the latter two.



**Figure 23:** Examples of participants' reflections and descriptions related to the referring to tweeting fiction as an "outlet".

Note: Larger version of figure available [here](#).





**Figure 24:** Examples of participants' reflections and descriptions related to collaborative contributions to the *Twitter Fiction Festival* referred to in turn

Note: Larger version of figure available [here](#).

## Conclusion

As we stated earlier, Luhman's (2000) *Systems theory of art* focuses on artistic expression as a complex social system of interactions, artifacts and expressions that communicate the values existing within a specific social and historical context. This can be related to Siegfried Schmidt's extensive studies of the modern literary culture as a social system where the acting possibilities of actors in the social system of literature are institutionally distributed into four "roles" or action dimensions: production, mediation,

reception and post-processing. Traditionally, writers are primarily placed within the production dimension. However, what it means to be a writer, a reader, a librarian or a critic is heavily dependent on the context. As Schmidt points out, the meaning of the modern role of "writers as producers" of literary work is derived from the practices and role expectations that writers are confronted with as literary creators. This is specifically of importance in our current changing media ecology. Therefore, we sought to explore the convergence of practices and socio-cultural roles in the production of literary work on a social media-based case study of the 2012 *Twitter Fiction Festival (TFF)*. The participants' descriptions and reflections have provided a valuable source for identifying different kinds of social reading and writing practices that emerge within the artistic space created through Twitter. Though our overview and descriptions are only tentative, they have allowed us to analyze the features and affordances of microblogging for literary production. Furthermore, they have allowed us to shed a light on how these practices and their affordances affect the acting possibilities and expectations of "producers" of literary fiction. Our findings suggest that the characteristics and affordances of social media indeed contribute to a more social experience of reading and writing fiction, as is often claimed — implicitly or explicitly — by developers of social media.

The first important characteristic is the opportunity for direct and instant bidirectional interaction and communication, which makes the various actors in the social system of literature increasingly visible and more approachable. As a consequence, writers and readers become more actively aware of each other. It is clear from the participants' reflections that this awareness seriously influenced how they conceived of their project for the *TFF*. In addition to the visibility, the opportunities for interaction and communication also seem to stress the loss, or rather, the lack of control over the narrative by the "author". Each participant responded to this in a different way. While some made attempts to seize control over the narrative by carefully planning and affording readers the role of critics or "beta-readers", others seemed to embrace the loss of control and opted for improvisation, experimentation and social playfulness as a means of artistic co-creation. By employing the latter approach, producers of literary fiction can take advantage of the affordances of social media to recognize readers' creative efforts, not as a tribute to their work, but as part of their work and the narrative world which they help to curate. This also shows that the "social system of art" is indeed a complex system that needs to take into account the different acts of communication, but that it should not neglect the role of the actors (readers/ writers) in this social system either.

The second key characteristic of social media, and digital media in general, is the potential and challenge of multimodal content creation. Social media like Twitter and events like the *TFF* appear to be an "outlet" for literary producers' creativity and urge to experiment with different forms of fiction writing. They present an opportunity to producers to try out something new, which mostly involves repurposing existing styles and techniques for creating fiction in a digital context. Nonetheless, the descriptions and reflections of the participants have clearly shown that fiction writing on social media involves much more than "mere words". It involves an intricate mix of various modalities, such as images, videos and sounds, but also hyperlinks, hashtags, mentions and retweets.

The third key characteristic of social media relates to the opportunity to create and build identities through content production, which inspires various participants in our study to consider the necessity of embodiment of their fictional characters. We have shown that participants who incorporate mixed modalities in their work contemplate the expectations related to traditional labels "writer" and "author". The participants suggest that labels such as literary "artist" can help to broaden the interpretations and expectations of what is considered literary fiction. More importantly, the label "artist" also serves as a form of recognition of the altered socio-cultural role and extended skill set required to create literary fiction in a social media environment where embodiment, responsiveness, timing and ingenuity are key qualities.




### Limitations and future directions

Our study intends to help broaden the field of social media studies by adding to its scope the exploration of social media affordances for artistic creation and cultural participation from a "writer" or literary producer's perspective. We are aware that our discussion of artistic creation and cultural participation from a literary producer's perspective focuses only on a specific set of issues that were or could have been addressed during the discussion with the participants. Future studies could focus more on, for instance, issues related to cultural differences and language barriers,

financial support and economic viability, or legal and political regulations. Nonetheless, we hope that the results of our study can inspire others to continue and broaden the research on artistic practices on and through social media.

In this paper, we have argued and shown that the *TFF* presents an interesting case for studying artistic practices on social media. Unfortunately, the case of the *TFF* also presents two shortcomings in terms of generalizability of the findings.

Firstly, our sample of participants is rather small compared to the population of Twitter users in its entirety. As a consequence, we have presented the findings of our study as the result of an explorative study. Despite the study's sample size, its findings already indicate how complex and diverse the perception and expectations are regarding practices and socio-cultural roles within the social system of literary culture and social media. We therefore believe that future studies on this topic should be cautious when determining sample sizes, as well as methods for data collection and analysis, to avoid drowning in data or drastically reducing the complexity crucial for understanding

Secondly, the case of the *TFF* focuses on a top-down initiative initiated by the developers of a social media platform. This implies that our sample is the result of an external selection process that inevitably excludes many equally interesting participants and practices. We think that future research would greatly benefit from studying bottom-up initiatives that are set up by users and artists instead of institutions or commercial entities. Though potentially much harder to locate within vast social media environments like Twitter, such bottom-up events have the potential to offer interesting alternative perspectives. They are more likely to include a broader range of artistic appropriations and experiments than the practices featured in this article, which must potentially be considered as mainstream practices. By extending the knowledge about artistic appropriations and experiments, scholars would eventually be able to develop a taxonomy of creative social media practices that can be used to inform initiatives for supporting and promoting digital culture. 

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## Notes

- [1.](#) Collins, 2010, p. 4.
- [2.](#) Standage, 2013, p. 5.
- [3.](#) Booth, 1988, pp. 38–39.
- [4.](#) Jenkins, 2006, p. 3.
- [5.](#) Collins, 2010, p. 2.
- [6.](#) Luhmann, 2000, pp. 17–18.
- [7.](#) *Ibid.*
- [8.](#) Schmidt, 1997, p. 124.
- [9.](#) Ricardo, 2009, p. 2.
- [10.](#) Barthes, 1977, p. 143.
- [11.](#) Manovich, 2001, p. 10.

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## Appendix: #TFFDiscuss participants' literary profiles and Twitter narratives<sup>2</sup>

### Session 1 (Southern Hemisphere): Thursday, 21 February 2013

*Lucy Coats* (@lucycoats) is a "children's author" who has produced titles such as: *One hungry baby* and *Hootcat hill*, and was located in the U.K. during the #TFF. She started using Twitter in July 2009 and through the sharing of 13,644 tweets has grown a network of 2,815 followers. During the #TFF Lucy repurposed content that she had previously worked into her children's books, tweeting and retweeting "100 Greek myths" (Coats, 2012).

*Stevie Ronnie* (@stevieronnie) is a "freelance writer, a researcher and tutor" working at the intersection of visual art, print, collaborative poetry and music. He produced the Brass Book Exhibition Programme and *The thing to do when you are not in love* and was located in the U.K. during the #TFF. He started using Twitter in October 2011 and through the sharing of 333 tweets has grown a network of 249 followers. During the #TFF Stevie curated the Twitter account @E\_L\_I\_P\_S\_E\_S (tweets: 50; followers: 30), using the account to repurpose an interactive poem (Ronnie, 2012) in 50 tweets that could be read in either direction. He did this by tweeting a few lines of the poem each day.

*Bituur Esztreym* (@bituur\_esztreym) is an artist and activist embracing coding as art, science and language. He is the founder of dogmazi.net (a Web site for free and open license music) and was located in France during the #TFF. He started using Twitter in December 2010, and through the sharing of 24,889 tweets has grown a network of 405 followers. During the #TFF Bituur worked together with @josephparis, @dubalai and @meloditx on the project #TwitRature (Paris, *et al.*, 2012), writing several collaborative sonnets through Twitter as a writing team.

*Joseph Paris* (@josephparis) is a "filmmaker/writer" and artist, producer of: *Propriété Intellectuelle* and *n.o.i.r. & b/l/a/n/c*, who was located in France during the #TFF. He started using Twitter in December 2008, and through the sharing of 4,000 tweets has grown a network of 1,151 followers. He is also linked to accounts like @radicalcmena (tweets: 6) and @crashtxt #twitterart and the "free coding/music" movement #copyleft. During the #TFF Joseph worked together with bituur\_esztreym, @dubalai and @meloditx on the project #TwitRature (Paris, *et al.*, 2012), writing several collaborative sonnets through Twitter as a writing team.

*Ifeoluwapo odedere* (@hypoxia13) is a "blogger writing about self-empowerment and self-discovery" and producer of "Musings of an analytical mind." He was located in Nigeria during the #TFF and started using Twitter in October 2011. Through the sharing of 6,086 tweets he has grown a network of 369 followers, and also curates the Twitter account, @dailynggets (tweets: 916, followers: 71). During the #TFF: Ifeoluwapo, #noLight — A satire (Odedere, 2012).

*Lauren Beukes* (@laurenbeukes) is a "writer aka glorified typist of novels, comics and screenplays" including *Zoo city* and *The shiny girls*. She was located in South Africa during the #TFF. She started using Twitter in April 2009, and through the sharing of 34,274 tweets has grown a network of 12,689 followers. During the #TFF Lauren created #litmash (Beukes, 2012a, 2012b), a "tweet-sized story writing-game that ran for one hour every day of the festival, which relied on incongruous genre/style literary mash-ups from peep suggestions."

*Gregory Barron* (@gregorybarron) is a "futurist, humanist, author" who writes thrillers such as *Rotten gods* and *Lethal sky*. He was located in Australia during the #TFF. He started using Twitter in March 2011, and through the sharing of 5,188 tweets has grown a network of 1,107 followers. Organized by his publisher HarperCollins Australia, during the #TFF Greg collaborated on "Around the world in 80 hours" (Gemmell, *et al.*, 2012), a "globetrotting, media mixing collaborative story" created by 12

participants (3 x authors, and the digital/marketing teams at HarperCollinsAU). Each participant was allocated a day/time to contribute and continue the narrative, which was managed through a Google Doc.

*Session 2 (Northern Hemisphere): Friday, 22 February 2013*

*Bituur Esztreym (@bituur\_esztreym) [see above]*

*Mélie Etzeandie (@meloditx)* is an "actress and artistic director of Du Jeu dans les Charnier(e)s — a company of living arts". She is a "performer of texts" producing work for theater, bars and film (e.g., *Emoi the edge of the world*, *Company* and *The Other Me*). She was located in France during the #TFF. Mélie started using Twitter in January 2011, and through the sharing of 4,486 tweets has grown a network of 416 followers. During the #TFF Mélie worked together with bituur\_esztreym, @dubalai and @josephparis on the project #TwitRature (Paris, et al., 2012), writing several collaborative sonnets through Twitter as a writing team.

*Claude Meunier (@dubalai)* is a literary artist who focuses on "short excursions", "going off on a different path" and, "tracing [his] reading, [his] literary reflections and illusions" through novels, essays and poetry such as *Paris n'est pas ce qu'il devrait* and *Petit abécédaire du rire et de ses environs*. He started using Twitter in April 2010, and through the sharing of 7,919 tweets has grown a network of 328 followers. During the #TFF Claude was located in France and worked together with bituur\_esztreym, @meloditx and @josephparis on the project #TwitRature (Paris, et al., 2012), writing several collaborative sonnets through Twitter as a writing team.

*Josh Gosfield (@JoshGosfield)* is a "creator of fictional celebrities, co-author of *The art of doing* and is his own minister of culture". Josh started using Twitter in July 2009, and through the sharing of 459 tweets has grown a network of 2,766 followers. Josh curates a number of Twitter accounts. Located in the U.S. during the #TFF, Josh experimented with characterization, using tweeting to embody and create the identity of a "1960s notorious English B-movie star, beauty queen and showgirl", @FathomButterfly (tweets: 493; followers: 2,573). He crafts her *Memoir in tweets* (Gosfield, 2012) supported by Storify and images and posts shared on her own Facebook page.

*Dana Sachs (@DanaSachs)*, is an author, a lover of words "writing and reading them" and producer of *The secret of the Nightingale Palace*. New to Twitter, she started using this medium in August 2012, and through the sharing of 873 tweets has grown a network of 189 followers. Located in the U.S. during the #TFF, Dana hosted the *Stone Soup literary dinner party* (Sachs, 2012a), celebrating craft and food. She was inspired by an old folk story to use the 'dinner metaphor' to bring readers and writers together and different literary characters to *Stone Soup*. In order to do so, she made use of the hashtag #ltdinner. Her purpose was to celebrate 'great writing (and perhaps duly bizarre food).'

*Ben Schrank (@BDSchran)* is an "author, columnist and publisher of *Razorbill*, an imprint of Penguin Young Readers". He has produced novels such as *Miracle Man Consent*, *Love is a Canoe* and is the voice of "Ben's Life," a fictional column for *Seventeen* magazine. Ben started using Twitter in August 2011, and through the sharing of 844 tweets has grown a network of 837 followers. Located in the U.S. during the #TFF, Ben participated in "All aboard the HMS Astute" (Schrank and Mechling, 2012), a collaborative character-driven story, supported by publisher @FSGBooks. The story focused on life in the home of "The Gronsteins: A modern American family going through a tough time after Dad [Ted] lost his job". Ben curated the tweets for nuclear sub-engineer dad @TedRothstein (Tweets: 105; Followers: 9) and Ted's wife, reformed academic @VeronicaPym (Tweets: 81; Followers: 17), was curated by @LaurenMchling (Ben's wife).

*Andrew Shaffer (@andrewshaffer)* is a literary artist and producer of satirical novels such as *Literary rogues and fifty shames of Earl Grey*, who was located in the U.S. during the #TFF. He started using Twitter in March 2009, and through the sharing of 43,558 tweets has grown a network of 6,002 followers. Andrew curates a number of Twitter accounts such as @evilwylie (Tweets: 19,261; Followers: 8,826) and @emperorfranzen (Tweets: 3,004; Followers: 2,380). During the #TFF Andrew curated @ProudZombieMom (Tweets: 87; Followers: 281) to create an interactive performance entitled "Proud zombie mom" (Shaffer, 2012).

*Albert Chimal (@albertochimal)* is a writer of novels, short stories and essays such as *Cómo empezar a escribir historias* and *La Generación Z y otros ensayos*. He was located in Mexico during the #TFF. He started using Twitter in April 2008, and through the sharing of 28,799 tweets has grown a network of 78,345 followers. During the #TFF, Alberto curated "MuchoPasados" (Chimal, 2012), "a writing game" enacted both in English



and Spanish through the Twitter account @hkustos (Tweets: 272; Followers: 456) whereby "with help of the Twitter community, Tweets will form branching stories".

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"Twitter, the most brilliant tough love editor you'll ever have." Reading and writing socially during the Twitter Fiction Festival by Joachim Vlieghe, Kelly Page, and Kris Rutten.  
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